



CHILDREN AND LEARNING SCRUTINY PANEL

FINAL REPORT: ASPECTS OF THE COUNCIL'S CORPORATE PARENTING RESPONSIBILITIES

PURPOSE OF THE REPORT

1. To present the Children and Learning Scrutiny Panel's findings, conclusions and recommendations following its investigation of aspects of the Council's corporate parenting responsibilities in the context of the Government White Paper "Care Matters: Time for Change".

BACKGROUND/AIMS OF THE SCRUTINY INVESTIGATION

2. The Government launched its "Care Matters: Time for Change" White Paper in 2007 with the aim of improving outcomes for children and young people in care. Its goal was stated as follows:

"Our aspirations for children in care are no less than each parent has for their own child. Children in care are often in much greater need than other children but much less likely to get the help they require. We aim to create a care system that provides every child with a safe, happy, healthy, secure and loving childhood, nurturing their aspirations and enabling them to fulfil their potential."

3. The scrutiny panel sought to investigate the current position, and implications of the white paper, in respect of certain aspects of the Council's responsibilities for children looked after.

THE PANEL'S INVESTIGATIONS

4. The scrutiny panel undertook an in-depth investigation and met formally on five occasions between 3 July and 24 September 2008. Information and evidence was submitted by Council officers.

5. A Scrutiny Support Officer from Performance and Policy co-ordinated and arranged the submission of written and oral evidence and arranged witnesses for the review. Meetings administration, including preparation of agenda and minutes, was undertaken by a Governance Officer from Legal and Democratic Services.
6. A detailed record of the topics discussed at Panel meetings, including agenda, minutes and reports, is available from the Council's Committee Management System (COMMIS), which can be accessed via the Council's website at www.middlesbrough.gov.uk.
7. A summary of the methods of investigation is outlined below:
 - (a) Detailed officer reports and presentations supplemented by oral evidence.
 - (b) Consideration of relevant documentation in respect of Government policy, national guidance etc.
8. This report has been compiled on the basis of evidence gathered at the scrutiny panel meetings.

MEMBERSHIP OF THE PANEL

9. The membership of the scrutiny panel was as follows:

Councillors Ismail (Chair), Williams (Vice-Chair); and Councillors Carter, Davison, Dunne, Mrs H Pearson OBE, Sanderson, Taylor and J Walker. Plus co-optees: C Hodds, Father G Holland and M White.

THE PANEL'S FINDINGS

10. The panel initially considered a summary of the white paper "Care Matters: Time for Change." Information was considered as follows:
 - Background to the development of "Care Matters: Time for Change."
 - An overview of key aspects of the white paper.

Background to the development of the "Care Matters: Time for Change" White Paper

11. The "Care Matters: Time for Change" Government White Paper, was published in June 2007 by the Department for Education and Skills (DfES). It highlighted a range of issues in relation to children in care (also known as "children looked after") and proposed a number of measures to address these issues.
12. Children and young people in care want to lead normal lives. They want to succeed in education, enjoy a wide range of positive activities and make a successful transition to adult life. The Government and those involved in their care must have high ambitions and expectations for them and must help them to reach their potential by providing excellent parenting, a high quality education, opportunities to develop their talents and skills, and effective support for their transition to adulthood.

13. A number of barriers prevent children in care from achieving this aim. As a result of their experiences they have often had a disrupted education, they may have difficulties with their social and emotional wellbeing, and they often lack stable relationships in their lives, resulting in attachment problems and a lack of resilience. It is vital that children and young people in care the encouragement and support necessary for them to overcome these barriers and succeed. Despite improvements in outcomes in recent years, there remains a gap between the outcomes of those in care and outcomes for all children. For example:
- Nationally in 2006 only 12% of children in care achieved 5 A*-C grades at GCSE (or equivalent) - compared to 59% of all children;
 - Their health is poorer than that of other children in that 45% of children in care are assessed as having a mental health disorder compared with around 10% of the general population.
 - Over 50% of children in care responding to the Care Matters consultation said that they had difficulties accessing positive activities;
 - In children in care aged 10 or over, 9.6% were cautioned or convicted for an offence during the year (almost 3 times the rate for all children of this age); and 30% of care leavers aged 19 were not in education, employment or training ('NEET').
14. In addition, some groups of children are over-represented in the care population - for example, disabled children, and some ethnic minority groups. Care Matters indicates that it is important that reform is taken forward in a way that reflects this diversity.
15. Central government, local authorities and their partners in children's trusts, individual professionals and carers all share responsibility for ensuring the best for children and young people in care. The difficulties faced by those in care cannot be overcome by any individual or part of the system acting alone. A co-ordinated approach is needed which builds on the measures put in place by the Every Child Matters programme and which delivers via prevention and intervention.
16. The Government published a Green Paper on looked after children, *Care Matters: Transforming the Lives of Children and Young People in Care* in late 2006. This indicated that, despite improvements in outcomes for children in care in recent years, there was a growing gap between these outcomes and those of other children, for whom progress had been greater. The green paper stated that the situation could not be allowed to continue and focused heavily on education and corporate parenting - it described education outcomes for children in care as "shocking statistics".
17. The Green Paper then identified the following priorities in order to close the gap in outcomes, and contained a chapter on each:
- Better support for those on the edge of the care system;
 - Making sure there is a more consistent adult in each child's life to fulfil the State's responsibilities as corporate parent;
 - Giving every child in care a stable, high quality placement;
 - Getting every child in care a place in a good school, helping them to get the most out of it and supporting them to continue in education post-16;
 - Securing support for all aspects of children's lives outside school;

- Supporting children better to make the transition into adult life; and
- Ensuring clear, strong accountability to make the whole system focus on the needs of children in care.

Key Areas for Action

18. The subsequent white paper “Care Matters: Time for Change” (published in June 2007) built on consultation responses to the green paper. The scrutiny panel considered a summary of the white paper, which highlighted its key points and indicated that action was proposed in a number of areas, as follows:

Corporate Parenting

19. Improving the role of the corporate is key to improving the outcomes for children in care. Care Matters proposes a number of measures to improve the corporate parenting role - such as strengthening the influence of children in care in respect of the services they receive and measuring outcomes relating to them, developing a ‘pledge’ to children in care and introducing a new inspection regime.

Family and Parenting Support

20. Detailed measures are included in the Care Matters White Paper to ensure that, wherever possible, children should be supported within their own families. This will require support for parents and short breaks for families with more complex needs. For children and young people who need to be cared for outside their immediate family, there should be an exploration of how children can live with, or be supported, by wider family and friends. There should also be specialist intervention (‘multi-systematic therapy’) for older children and children on the edge of care.

Care Placements

21. A successful, stable placement is central to supporting the needs of children in care. Carers are at the centre of a child or young person’s experience of corporate parenting and should provide the mainstay of their support. Proposals are included in the white paper relating to improving the overall position concerning placements. This includes ensuring that children placed outside an area receive a high level of support; by piloting regional commissioning units; by improving foster care through training and support; and requiring all children in care to be visited by their social worker.

Education

22. A high quality education provides the foundation for transforming the lives of children in care. Those who do well in education are more likely to go on to employment, to lead healthier lives and to play a more active part in society. Proposals included in the white paper are aimed at improving education outcomes for children in care - for example by giving them priority in school admission arrangements; personalising their learning with specific financial support for their education; and improving support for reducing school absence and exclusion.

Health and well-being

23. Promoting Good health is vital to the lives of children and young people. It enables them to lead enjoyable and fulfilling lives and underpins achievement at school and in adult life. The task of improving health needs to be approached holistically - it is not the concern of the National Health Service alone. The white paper indicates that a new joint strategic needs assessment will be introduced; new standards of support will be set for pregnant young women and mothers in care and leaving care and; there will be better sex and relationship education; a new indicator on

emotional and behavioural difficulties will be considered and there will be an improvement in availability of positive activities for children and young people in care.

Transition to adulthood

24. At present, there is an expectation that young people leaving the care system will have the skills necessary to cope on their own. However, young people without parental and family support are often exposed to greater risks than other adolescents. A number of measures are proposed to support young people in this transition - such as ensuring they are properly prepared, providing the support of a personal advisor up to age 25 for all care leavers who are either in education or wish to return to education; allowing young people to remain with foster carers up to the age of 21; and local authorities considering what employment opportunities/training they and their partners can offer young people.

The role of the practitioner

25. The day to day experience of children in care is shaped by practitioners who work directly with the young people. It is therefore proposed to take steps to ensure that a highly skilled, committed and stable workforce delivers individual support to every child and young person. Measures will include improving the skills and training of social workers, developing partnerships with external agencies and remodelling the social care workforce to enable social workers to spend more time with a child.

Next steps

26. The white paper indicated that, despite high ambitions and a shared commitment for change, outcomes for children and young people in care had not been sufficiently improved. There remained a significant gap between the quality of their lives and those of all children. Tackling this issue would require urgent, sustained action across central and local government, from practitioners in all aspects of children and young people's lives and from their carers, friends and family. In order to introduce the measures proposed by Care Matters, the Government indicated that it would:
- introduce appropriate legislation and a regulatory framework.
 - provide additional resources - of £13.5m in 2007/08 and £89m/£96m/£107m in 2008-11.
 - introduce a new partnership model of delivery across the statutory and voluntary sectors.
 - work with the private sector to explore the potential of major sponsorship programmes.
27. The Children and Young Persons Bill (CYPB) introduced in the House of Lords on 14 November 2007 aims to fulfil commitments made in the Care Matters White Paper. At the time of writing (September 2008), the bill is scheduled for a third reading in the House of Commons in October 2008. The Bill will strengthen the legislative framework underpinning the care system - ensuring the right structure is in place to enable children and young people to receive high quality care and support. It will also ensure that those entering the care system are able to share the same aspirations as those in supportive family homes. The CYPB is only a part of the Care Matters reform package and will be supported by regulations and an update to the Children Act 1989 Guidance, as well as proactive partnerships with local authorities to share and develop good practice.

28. An implementation plan for the white paper was published jointly with the Children's Inter-Agency Group in March 2008. This marked a new phase in the Care Matters programme - a shift from developing policy nationally to delivering change locally. It aims to support local Children's Trusts, led by Lead Members and Directors of Children's Services, to transform outcomes for children and young people in care. Timescales are identified between 2008 and 2011.
29. The implementation document sets a clear direction for improvement, outlining how the performance management framework will support this and explaining the changes being made to legislation and guidance to promote better service delivery. It guides Children's Trust partners in implementing change locally, encouraging systematic planning and improvement led by local agencies and professionals, as well as listing the tools, resources and support available to assist delivery.
30. It also explains how progress will be monitored and evaluated, via feedback from children and young people, input from Ofsted, analysis of data and the evaluation of various pilots.

The scrutiny review

31. In view of the wide ranging implications of the white paper, and the potentially large scale of the scrutiny review should the implications of the whole document be examined, information was initially considered in respect of the following aspects of services for looked after children in Middlesbrough:
 - a) The involvement of young people in the decision making process that influences when they leave care.
 - b) 'Right 2 B Cared 4' pilots - which have been established in a number of other local authorities.
 - c) Consideration of the developing work on the 'Staying Put': 18+ Family Pilots in Middlesbrough.
 - d) Training for foster carers, which is to be developed so that they can provide help to young people to learn the practicalities of living alone.
 - e) The provision of a Personal Adviser to maintain a pathway plan for (i) every young person who still has to achieve educational qualifications or training and (ii) any young person up to 25 who asks for assistance with further education or training.
 - f) Review of the co-operation between housing and children's services regarding meeting the needs of children in care.
 - g) Development of the Pledge for Children in the Care of the Council.

TERMS OF REFERENCE

32. Having considered information on the Care Matters:Time for Change white paper, and the areas outlined above, the scrutiny panel agreed to identify and examine several key aspects of the Council's corporate parenting responsibilities in the light of the paper. These were as follows:

- training and support for foster carers
- employment opportunities for young people leaving care who are not in employment, education or training (“NEET”)
- the supported lodgings scheme
- emotional and mental health support for children looked after

33. Terms of reference of the scrutiny investigation were then agreed as follows:

In the context of the Council’s overall corporate parenting responsibilities and the Government White Paper “Care Matters: Time for Change”:

- *To investigate training and support that is made available to foster carers.*
- *To assess how the Council might encourage partner organisations to promote or offer employment opportunities for young people not in employment, education or training (“NEET”).*
- *To examine how existing arrangements for the supported lodging scheme are operating.*
- *To examine support arrangements for children looked after in respect of emotional and mental health issues.*

34. The panel’s findings in respect of each of the terms of reference are shown below.

TERM OF REFERENCE: “To investigate training and support that is made available to foster carers”

35. The scrutiny panel considered information on the process of recruiting and training of foster carers by the Council.

36. The Council’s Fostering Preparation Group is the main body involved in training and preparing foster carers. The group is driven by the principles of the Care Matters white paper - especially support for foster carers and the emphasis which is placed on a need to ‘champion’ children in care. With this in mind, the recruitment of carers aims to attract people who can bring the best out of children looked after. Care Matters also indicates that - given their important role - local authorities should ‘value’ foster carers. This has resulted in the Council examining this aspect of foster care, for example by reviewing support that is available and also the allowance system. Although overall support has always been good, as confirmed by OFSTED inspection results, the service is always seeking to improve further.

37. Every prospective foster carer attends an intensive five day Foster Preparation Group training course/briefing. As well as being a means of the authority assessing the suitability of applicants and ensuring that they meet the required competencies, the aim of the course is to make carers fully aware of what they can expect by becoming a foster carer as well as their and the local authority’s responsibilities. The course also presents an opportunity for applicants to decide whether they wish to pursue fostering. Having learned what is involved, some prospective carers decide not to proceed with their application. The role of the Fostering Preparation Group is also to helping applicants to make an informed decision.

38. Prior to assessment and approval a vigorous system of checks (such as via the national Criminal Records Bureau) is in place for applicants and their families. Home visits are undertaken by social workers, who assess matters such as family circumstances and motivation to foster and who speak to all members of the household. At the end of these processes a decision is made on whether it is appropriate to proceed with an application to become a foster carer. Following the Foster Preparation Group, the next stage of the process is home study. This involves a minimum of six sessions covering topics such as background, history and parenting experiences as well as involving interviewing two referees for applicants. The final stage in the process is the approval (or not) of an application by the Council's Family Placement Panel.
39. Once foster carers are registered, regular refresher training is provided to cover emerging or topical issues or matters such as legislation changes. Feedback is also sought from carers, which is used to develop and amend training programmes.
40. In considering the work of the Fostering Preparation Group the panel also examined the Council Fostering Service "Statement of Purpose 2008-09," specific aspects of which relate to training and support for carers as follows:
- Ways in which the aims and objectives of the Statement of Purpose will be achieved, including:
 - recruiting, preparing and assessing prospective foster carers and their families.
 - supporting, developing and retaining approved foster carers and their families.
 - National and local standards which will be used to deliver the service - including positive support for carers in terms of information and assessment and payments based on skills and experience.
 - Services and facilities which are provided to prospective foster carers and to those already registered with Middlesbrough Fostering Service.
41. The scrutiny panel also heard that new standards for foster carers were to become effective from September 2008. Although these will essentially formalise a lot of training work which the Council already undertakes, work will take place to ensure that all of the new standards are met.
42. In terms of the implications of the Care Matters white paper on training and support for foster carers, the emphasis will be on improving care placements. A key challenge in Middlesbrough will be to ensure that (as far as possible) local placements are available. In addition, although historically there has been a very low level of dropouts among Middlesbrough's foster carers, and numbers have generally been maintained over the years, the number of carers is currently falling.
43. Examination of this term of reference highlighted work which is done to ensure that foster carers are adequately trained and supported to undertake their role.

TERM OF REFERENCE: “To examine how existing arrangements for the supported lodging scheme are operating.”

44. In October 2001, The Children (Leaving Care) Act came into force. One of the objectives set by the Government was “To ensure that young persons leaving care and entering adulthood are not isolated and participate socially and economically as adults.” This placed a requirement on local authorities to make special arrangements for young people leaving care, and to ensure that there is a choice of suitable accommodation graded to their needs.
45. In the past, children as young as 16 leaving the care system nationally had been left to fend for themselves. They often faced difficulties living on their own, which led to further problems for this very vulnerable group in our society. Many care leavers moved in to bed and breakfast accommodation because there was nowhere else for them to live. The Government intended that The Children (Leaving Care) Act would address this situation and would result in young people being placed in suitable accommodation. The Act sought to strengthen the Children Act 1989 by working towards the following:
- reducing the number of placement moves within the care system
 - increasing placement choice
 - avoiding early discharge from care
 - improving outcomes for care leavers
46. The Supported Lodging Scheme was therefore intended to bridge the gap between living in care and living independently in the community. The scheme is primarily designed for young people aged 16-19 years old who for various reasons are unable to live at home with their families and who may have been looked after by the local authority.
47. The basis of the scheme is for young people leaving care, for whom the authority is responsible as a corporate parent, to be given the opportunity to live in friendly and supportive family surroundings, where they will receive help and guidance to enable them to develop responsible behaviour and the skills necessary to live independently. Lodgings are provided by private individuals who offer a room in their home and varying levels of support to the young person. A support plan is put in place that stipulates the type and level of support to be provided. The scheme may also be used to facilitate the extension of foster placements.
48. The relevant legislation provides a context for delivering supported lodging by requiring care leavers to be placed in suitable accommodation and every young person to have:
- an assessment
 - continued contact until age 21
 - a pathway plan
 - a personal advisor
49. The scrutiny panel considered detailed information on the operation of the supported lodging scheme. Key points were highlighted as follows:

Eligibility criteria

50. The scheme covers young people who are eligible for a leaving care service, who are aged between 16 (statutory leaving school age) and 21 (age 24 if in full time higher education). Referrals can be made through the young persons Social Worker/Personal Advisor or can come from the young person themselves to the Supported Lodgings Scheme co-ordinator.
51. A referral form is completed in each case. This contains information such as accommodation history, identified support needs and risk assessment (eg any history of violent/aggressive behaviour, self-harm, criminal record, drug/alcohol misuse etc) and enables a decision to be made as to whether the supported lodgings scheme is appropriate. Young people with severe problems are generally excluded from the scheme to ensure that providers do not receive someone with problems that they cannot manage.

Recruitment and training of supported lodging providers

52. Middlesbrough Council's Leaving Care Team is responsible for recruiting, preparing, assessing, supervising, supporting, training and developing lodging providers.
53. Recruitment takes place at a local level through advertising and information and training provision to relevant departments that may reach suitable candidates (e.g. fostering). Recruitment aims to attract suitable providers from all ethnic, cultural, racial and religious groups.
54. A comprehensive process, involving a number of home visits and detailed assessment is used to determine the suitability of applicants. A report is produced which assesses:
 - age
 - health
 - personality
 - religion
 - employment
 - leisure
 - experience of providing support to young people
55. Relevant checks are also undertaken, including reasons for offering supported lodgings and Criminal Records Bureau (CRB) checks for household members over the age of 16. A health assessment is also required, together with references. In addition, checks are carried out with the Council's Children, Families and Learning Department and other agencies such as health, the NSPCC and any other supported lodging schemes.
56. Completed reports are considered by the Council's Family Placement Panel, which makes a recommendation on the application for determination by the Executive Director of Children, Families and Learning.

57. Information gained from the report and from the young person is used to achieve the most appropriate and suitable placement. A number of meetings are arranged between the young person, personal advisor, social worker (if applicable) the prospective lodging provider and the Supported Lodgings Co-ordinator. At least one meeting is also arranged between the young person and lodging provider to assist both in determining if they wish to proceed with the placement.
58. Preparation and induction training is provided for all new supported lodgings providers and a comprehensive training package is devised for each provider, based on their individual requirements. Ongoing training can also be provided at the provider's request, or if identified as beneficial by a worker in the leaving care team.
59. Training for providers covers such issues as why young people come into care; how to manage difficult behaviour/critical incidents; communication, confidentiality, reporting concerns; and safety and security of the lodging provider and property.

Monitoring and evaluation

60. Effective monitoring is necessary to ensure that the aims of the placement are achieved and that standards are kept. This can take place through home visits, meetings, phone calls or reviews involving other professionals.
61. All Supported Lodging Scheme providers will be supervised and supported through the scheme co-ordinator. Support can be provided on a one-to-one basis or as a group. Following commencement of the placement, the scheme co-ordinator will visit the provider at least once per week for the first four weeks. A new contact agreement is then arranged to suit the providers needs.
62. The lodger receives ongoing support through their personal advisor and any other relevant agencies as defined in their Pathway Plan. Regular meetings involving support staff, the lodgings provider and young person are held to evaluate the placement. These will consider any issues identified, together with appropriate action to resolve them. In addition, an annual review is undertaken of the suitability of the provider and accommodation to identify any positive/negative issues, highlight any training requirements or changes in household circumstances etc.
63. An end of placement evaluation is also undertaken. This is used to monitor the ongoing effectiveness of the scheme. Forms are completed by the lodger and provider and are used to assess whether a placement was satisfactory; what was achieved; whether the placement had been ended as planned (or unplanned/in an emergency); whether any training requirements had been highlighted; any possible improvements.
64. The scrutiny panel also considered information in relation to the following aspects of the supported lodgings scheme:
 - **Licence Agreement:** A licence agreement is put in place in respect of each placement. This defines the operation, conditions, termination & legal status between the supported lodgings provider and the scheme. It also includes agreed house rules to be adhered to.

- **House Agreement:** Prior to a placement commencing a house agreement is put into place. This is agreed by the lodger, provider, personal advisor and scheme worker. Such agreements cover the ground rules of the household and areas of responsibility so that all parties are aware of what is expected of them during the placement - eg catering arrangements, cleaning, laundry, visitors, keys, privacy and arrangements for staying out late or overnight.
- **Finance:** Providers are paid £135 per week from the leaving care team budget for all 16 and 17 year old lodgers who are eligible for a leaving care service. The same budget is used to pay for lodgers aged 18 plus, subject to reclaiming a basic rent charge from housing benefit or supporting people funding, where applicable. Lodgers pay a designated amount to the provider towards the costs of meals and laundry. The Council is in the process of reviewing financial aspects of the scheme and is aware that some local authorities pay higher rates to lodging providers.
- **Foster placement conversion to supported lodgings:** When a young person reaches 18 there is an option to convert a foster placement into supported lodgings subject to an agreed procedure and relevant checks. Financial arrangements are also discussed and to be agreed by all parties prior to conversion.
- **National Staying Put pilot scheme:** The Government has launched this initiative in ten pilot areas in England. The scheme aims to allow young people to stay in care beyond age 18 and support them in finding training and employment opportunities and moving on to independence. The Department for Children Schools and Families (DCSF) hopes that the pilot schemes will help to develop a better understanding of the possible practical and financial barriers that could arise when foster carers provide support to young adults from a care background. During the pilot period the DCSF plans to develop and test solutions to problems that emerge. This will assist in developing a model to enable as many young people as possible to benefit from remaining with their foster carers. Although Middlesbrough is not included in the pilot scheme, the scheme's results could impact on future care arrangements nationally and on the supported lodging scheme.
- **Support beyond age 18:** Independent providers will generally not provide support after this age. There is a need to ensure that this issue is recognised and addressed - for example by examining whether foster carer placements can be converted to supported lodging. Financial issues will also need to be addressed.

65. Examination of this term of reference highlighted steps which are taken to ensure that suitable accommodation is offered to young people leaving care and that support is provided during the transition.

TERM OF REFERENCE: “To assess how the Council might encourage partner organisations to promote or offer employment opportunities for young people in care or leaving care who are not in employment, education or training (‘NEET’)”

66. The scrutiny panel sought information on how the activities and plans of the council (as corporate parents) aim to improve access to employment, education and training for young people in and leaving care.

Background Information and action to date

67. Although the scrutiny exercise specifically related to children looked after, the panel considered background information on the issues surrounding ‘NEET’ - that is young people who are “not in education, training or employment” - in Middlesbrough. Being NEET between the ages of 16-18 has been shown to be a major predictor of later unemployment, low income, teenage motherhood, depression and poor health.

68. Historically, the borough has had a large cohort of young people who are classified as NEET. When the present cycle of NEET targets was set by National Government in 2005, Middlesbrough (along with Hackney) had the highest rate of NEET within the country. As a consequence of this Middlesbrough was set the second most stringent target for NEET reduction in England over the period 2005-2010 with a proportionate 30% reduction required in order to reduce the figure from 15.5% to 10.8% of the cohort.
69. The Connexions service was established nationally in 2001 with the aim of providing a comprehensive service to meet young people's needs for information, advice and support. Connexions has played an important role locally in assisting young people, including children looked after.
70. The statutory responsibility for the delivery of Connexions services was passed to local authorities in April 2007, when Connexions resources were disaggregated. Due to an imaginative and creative use of Connexions resources since that time, the proportion of young people who are NEET has reduced by 19% over the past year (although still remaining above the national average). This reduction is almost 50% greater than reductions experienced regionally (14%) and nationally (13%) in the three-month measurement period November 2007 to January 2008.
71. With regard to looked after young people during this same period, the proportion of looked after young people who are NEET was a very challenging 39%. At 46% slightly fewer are in education, employment or training (EET) at 19 than the national average of 49%.
72. The Pathways Team, under the duties of The Children (Leaving Care) Act 2000, promote young people remaining in care until they are prepared and ready to leave and where possible beyond the age of 18 years. Once young people have left care the service will actively support young people to lead positive lives as independent citizens.
73. Connexions Personal Advisers, working alongside the Pathways Team, offer impartial information, advice and guidance to young people to help and assist them to make an informed choice with regard to opportunities in education, employment and training. The primary outcome of this approach is to further close the gap between Middlesbrough and the national average with regard to the percentage of young people who are NEET.
74. Along with partner agencies - including Job Centre Plus, E2E (Entry to Employment), Middlesbrough College and St. Mary's Further Education College - a range of training is provided to young people. They are encouraged and supported to access education, employment and training and promote economic wellbeing.
75. Since 2005 the Pathways Team has benefited from having a dedicated Connexions Personal Adviser for young people. The Connexions Service is provides 3 days per week between 2 dedicated Personal Advisers during which time they are co-located within the Pathways Team. This has proved to be very successful and young people have had the benefit of consistent workers, who are experienced in working with young people in care and leaving care. In addition workers within both teams have developed very positive relationships, joint training and development days have been facilitated and Connexions Personal Advisers attend Pathways Team Meetings.

76. The Pathways Team, Connexions and Middlesbrough College are currently working together to develop a Partnership Agreement and Practice Guidance to support young people embarking on further education courses at Middlesbrough College. It is hoped to replicate elements of the 'designated teacher' role within schools to provide a 'designated tutor' whose aim will be to identify and support young people in care and leaving care within the further education setting.
77. In 2005 Middlesbrough Pathways Team developed an Employability Scheme, which was piloted as part of a national European funded initiative, 'What Makes The Difference'. This project piloted a range of initiatives aimed at identifying ways to improve the lives of young people in care and leaving care. Middlesbrough was chosen to pilot the 'Individual Tuition and Employability' element of the project
78. The Corporate Parenting Board and the Corporate Management Team supported the Middlesbrough Employability Scheme. In essence, Middlesbrough Council, as a corporate parent to those young people in care and leaving care, provided work experience placements within Council departments - effectively providing work within 'the family business'. The Employability and Individual Tuition pilots have been very successful, with both achieving national recognition and excellent feedback. The scrutiny panel also considered specific examples and case studies of young people who have been assisted by these programmes.
79. It is hoped to build on the success to date and further develop the Employability scheme. To facilitate this, a draft bid for Big Lottery funding has been prepared, which (if successful) will provide funding for an employability worker and provide an apprenticeship training allowance to be paid to the young people involved. The role of the worker will be to engage with young people to identify their hopes and aspirations with regards to access to education, employment and training. Work will be continued with Council departments, partner agencies and local employers to develop a portfolio of work placements that young people can access. This work will be carried out in conjunction with the Neighbourhood Employment Gateway initiative being delivered via Economic Regeneration. The scrutiny panel was advised that to date, after writing to local employers, the Employability Scheme had been unsuccessful in placing young people in care in private sector work placements.
80. The scrutiny panel heard that the corporate Human Resources function has been very supportive with regards to the Employability Scheme and has agreed to allow young people in care and leaving care to access in house training courses. Human Resources is also to provide induction sessions on the work of the Council for the young people.
81. Building on the success of the pilot scheme for individual tuition, Middlesbrough School Management Forum has provided additional funding for Key Stage 4 young people, to develop personalised learning packages for the most disaffected young people to maintain their education. If young people are able to have positive experiences and successful outcome while they are in statutory education they are more likely to positively embark on further education, employment or training.
82. The Pathways Team has a financial policy in place to support young people in and leaving care accessing further and higher education. This policy includes maximising benefits including support via the Connexions Personal Advisers in accessing Education Maintenance Allowance and grants available and also clearly

sets out what financial support young people can expect should they embark on higher education. This policy includes retaining a home base, should they study elsewhere in the country, and paying for course fees, should the young person actively commit to attending university and fulfil all requirements of the course. The team provides financial incentives to young people to undertake training, voluntary work or education.

83. The Pathways Team has developed good links with Teesside University to ensure care leavers are identified and supported within the university. In addition we seek the agreement of young people to communicate with tutors at their chosen university. This is to ensure all support needs are addressed from the outset and that they have regular reviews as stipulated within the young person's Pathway Plan.
84. Pathways Team, New Deal (a government programme that aims to give unemployed people the help and support they need to get into work), TNG (a recruitment, training, consultancy, mentoring and business support service for individuals and organisations) and Connexions have developed a partnership agreement aim at improving the employability of care leavers which includes fast tracking to New Deal and the use of work placement provided through the employability scheme.
85. The Pathways Team is also currently developing a Peer Support scheme which aims to employ young people. This role will be for a person in or leaving care who can develop a trusting relationship with another young person within the service. Peer Support can offer a range of support measures to enhance service to a young person who may be experiencing a time of difficulty or transition, or who will benefit from a befriending relationship. Peer Support can also involve informal kinds of advocacy such as enabling young people to support each other within the safety and structure of the Leaving Care Service. It can also provide learning opportunities, can involve young people in service delivery and integrate young people's views and participation in service development and design. Young People employed as Peer Support Workers will complete an induction programme, supervision and training and receive payment to undertake the role.

Implications of the Care Matters White Paper

86. Proposals outlined in the white paper "Care Matters: Time to Deliver for Children in Care" rightly acknowledge that a good education is the key to economic wellbeing and positive outcomes for young people in care and leaving care. The Care Matters Implementation Plan sets out the following proposals to improve the educational outcomes for young people in care:
 - Virtual Head Teacher -11 local authorities have piloted proposals to appoint a 'virtual head teacher' in each local authority responsible for young people in care. Further guidance will be issued following the conclusion of the pilots.
 - A designated teacher role is to become a statutory requirement with guidance issued to define the role and responsibilities.
 - Responsibility placed on local authorities to endeavour to maintain a young person within their school irrespective of where they are placed should that be required to meet their assessed needs. There is a specific requirement to maintain consistency of education for young people in years 10 and 11.

- Introduction of Personal Educational Allowances for every child in care. This is intended to pay for activities or resources supporting learning and development that a parent (rather than a school, local authority or other services) would normally be expected to fund for a child not in care.
- Introduces the requirement for the appointment of a Connexions Personal Adviser for all care leavers in higher education up to the age of 25 years. Middlesbrough Connexions service has committed to providing this service.
- Introduction of £2000 bursary for all care leavers entering higher education.
- Stability of placement is vital to young people as they embark on adulthood and into employment, education and training. Without placement stability and the support this brings, young people will face immense difficulties in focussing their energies on their studies or employment. To this end Care Matters is strengthening its efforts to ensure young people are able to remain in their placement until they are prepared and ready to leave and at least 18 years old. Within Middlesbrough we have demonstrated a commitment to maintain placement until 18 years and beyond.

87. The scrutiny panel heard that over the last few years, there has been a steady improvement in performance indicators for young people leaving care in education, employment and training at age 19. The Council continues to be actively engaged with young people to support them to raise their aspirations and achieve economic wellbeing. The joint working between Connexions and the Pathways team has led to a significant improvement in the quality of the interaction between the individual young people and the link to education, employment and training. Consequently, this will help Middlesbrough to close the gap and exceed the national average with regard to placing into the world of work.

88. Examination of this term of reference highlighted the range of work which is undertaken to assist and support who are in care or leaving care towards employment, education and training.

TERM OF REFERENCE: “*To examine support arrangements for children looked after in respect of emotional and mental health issues*”.

89. The scrutiny panel sought to examine how the activities and plans of the Council (as a corporate parent) and those of partner agencies aim to improve the mental health and wellbeing of children and young people looked after. Key points that were examined related to the following:

- General background relating to mental health issues among young people in care.
- Information relating to The South Tees, Child and Adolescent Mental Health Looked After Children’s Service (known as “CAMHS”).
- The implications of the “Care Matters” White Paper.
- Future and ongoing developments.

General background

90. Under the “Care Matters: Time for Change” proposals, the Government is committed to improving outcomes for looked after children. This aim is also reflected in the national indicator target for placement stability. For this group of children, stability is a key factor that can make a positive difference to their lives - providing them with the opportunity to form strong attachments with carers and friends, maximising their resilience and improving their chances of achieving positive outcomes.
91. Most children become looked after as a result of abuse or neglect, with a smaller proportion looked after because of family dysfunction or distress. Early care experiences have long term consequences for children’s health and social development. Entering care is strongly associated with poverty and deprivation (for example, low income, parental unemployment, relationship breakdown) and the outcomes associated with deprivation often persist into adulthood. Many children and young people who are looked after experience significant health inequalities throughout childhood and on leaving care experience poor health, educational and social outcomes. Negative experiences in care, including frequent change of placements, increase a child risk of poor outcomes. All of these factors can lead to, or exacerbate existing, mental health problems among young people in care. Such problems are well recognised, together with the importance of providing appropriate interventions or levels of care.

South Tees, Child and Adolescent Mental Health Looked After Children’s Service (CAMHS).

92. The South Tees, Child and Adolescent Mental Health Looked After Children’s Service is a dedicated mental health service for looked after children, which aims to improve the outcomes for children and young people who experience mental health problems. The service, which was developed in recognition of the high levels of mental health problems experienced by children in care (around 45% compared to approximately 10% of the general population), is jointly funded by Middlesbrough and Redcar and Cleveland Councils through a CAMHS Grant which is paid to Children’s Services.
93. CAMHS offers a range of provisions to children and young people looked after by Middlesbrough and Redcar and Cleveland Councils. The service is provided by professionals employed by Tees, Esk and Wear Valleys NHS Trust and works with young people up to the age of 18 years who require specialist mental health assessment and - where appropriate - therapeutic input for emotional, behavioural or psychological problems. The overall aim of the dedicated CAMHS Looked After Service is to improve the emotional, psychological and mental health of children and young people looked after by Middlesbrough. This service is provided by a small multi-disciplinary team.
94. The CAMHS Looked After Service provides:
 - Consultation and advice to field social workers and placement workers on young people’s emotional, behavioural and psychological problems and how psychological needs may be met.
 - Advice and work with carers of individual young people in Local Authority care on supporting them through their difficulties.

- Mental health assessment (including risk assessment) and management of psychiatric problems in young people in Local Authority care.
 - Consultation and training (where indicated) to staff groups and foster carers employed directly Middlesbrough Local Authority, in collaboration with service managers.
95. A referral process is in place to ensure access to the above services, with social work teams able to directly refer and also access formal consultation with practitioners.
96. Middlesbrough has a dedicated team within Social Care for children and young people looked after. This is not the case in all local authorities. The team has benefited from having consistent and highly motivated staff, which has enabled children and young people to form long standing relationships with their social workers. This further enhances opportunities for the young people to form attachments with a positive adult role model.
97. Children, Families & Learning facilitates training to professionals and foster carers directly working with children and young people on issues pertaining to mental health. All children and young people are encouraged to undertake an annual health assessment which addresses emotional wellbeing. The Pathways Team, in conjunction with a Children Looked After Nurse, facilitates group work sessions with young people, concentrating upon their emotional wellbeing and positive mental health and self-esteem.
98. All children and young people have an annual assessment of need and care plan. This process adopts a holistic view of the needs of children and young people with emotional wellbeing being an integral feature.
99. The scrutiny panel was advised that placement stability is recognised as a key factor in promoting emotional wellbeing of children and young people looked after. Over recent years the Council's performance is considered to have improved in this area.

Care Matters White Paper

100. The "Care Matters: Time for Change" White Paper highlights the need to improve the mental health of children and young people in care. Evidence suggests that looked after children and young people are nearly five times more likely to have a mental health disorder than all children. Foster carers frequently report that there are problems associated with the emotional wellbeing and mental health of the children and young people in their care.
101. Care Matters emphasises the Government's commitment to improving the mental health of children and young people in care and makes proposals for improvement. From April 2008 all Local Authorities in England will be required to provide information on the emotional and behavioural health of children and young people in care. This data will be collected by Local Authorities through a Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire (SDQ) and a summary figure for each child (the total difficulties scored) will be submitted to the Department for Children, Schools and Families.

102. The data collected will provide both local and national information on the emotional and behavioural health of looked after children. The data will provide Local Authorities with a useful way of assessing the mental health needs of children and young people who are in care.
103. The SDQ will only be completed on children and young people looked after aged between 4 and 16 years inclusive. The SDQ should be completed by the main carer and is a short behavioural screening questionnaire. It has five sections that cover:
 - Emotional difficulties
 - Conduct problems
 - Hyperactivity
 - Friendships and peer groups
 - Positive behaviour
104. The scrutiny panel heard that although SDQs had initially been viewed by officers as an increase in bureaucracy, they are proving to be highly useful assessment tools which have assisted in determining appropriate intervention and assistance in the case of mental health problems among young people in care. Although SDQs have been introduced only fairly recently, officers indicate that their use has enhanced the service available to young people.

Future and Ongoing Developments

105. The CAMHS Grant for 2008/09 has enabled an additional number of children and young people to receive CAMHS involvement. This has included specialised assessments and specific support for children and young people who are in placements outside Middlesbrough. Often in situations involving placements that are not within the local area it is difficult to access services. CAMHS involvement in these circumstances will ensure that children and young people's needs are met.
106. In addition, work has been commissioned to address both the development of the Self Harm Protocol launch and organise a training event work is ongoing on a dual-diagnosis protocol. (Dual diagnosis involves cases where young people have more than one mental health need.) Also, initial discussions are underway to use the grant to develop the services for children and young people with learning difficulties and/or disabilities who have mental health needs. This is an area which requires investment - it has been identified as an area where there are gaps in provision which the authority is committed to improving.
107. Although CAMHS currently delivers an excellent service, further developments are underway to address gaps in service provision.
108. Examination of this term of reference illustrated the importance of providing emotional and mental health support for children in care, together with the range of services that are available.

CONCLUSIONS

109. Based on the evidence gathered in the scrutiny investigation the Panel concluded that:
- 1) The “Care Matters” white paper is a significant document in aiming to improve outcomes for children and young people in care. In terms of social and emotional wellbeing, health, education and relationships, evidence shows that outcomes for this sector of the population are far worse than for other children and young people.
 - 2) Middlesbrough Council has recognised the problems faced by children in care and, as corporate parent, can demonstrate that a lot of good work has been, and is being, undertaken to improve outcomes for them. For example, not all local authorities have a dedicated social care team for children looked after, which is the position in Middlesbrough. Further action is nevertheless required to improve the position even further. However, the difficulties faced cannot be overcome by one organisation acting alone. Improvement can only be effected by a shared responsibility involving the local authority as corporate parent, together with its partner organisations, to provide appropriate support and intervention.
 - 3) Wide ranging training and support is available for prospective foster carers and also after recruitment. Middlesbrough’s foster carers are well prepared for the role and are also well supported in terms of post-recruitment assistance and ongoing training.
 - 4) The supported lodging scheme is an important element of the process of supporting young people in the transition from care to independent living and appears to be working well in Middlesbrough.
 - 5) The Council has recognised the particular problems associated with the level of young people in Middlesbrough who are not in education, employment or training (‘NEET’) and has been involved (with other organisations) in making significant improvements in this area. This work has also involved young people in care who are NEET, with very positive results. There is, however, scope to improve the position in terms of links with non-Council employers - for example by increasing the availability of training or work experience placements in the private/commercial sector for young people in care.
 - 6) Support for children looked after in terms of emotional and mental health issues is well developed in Middlesbrough, especially through the South Tees Child and Adolescent Mental Health Looked After Children’s Service (‘CAMHS’). Given the significant problems which have often been encountered by children entering care, and the consequences which this can have on mental health, the extensive support that is available is particularly welcomed. Future developments (including the implications of the ‘Care Matters’ white paper and plans to address gaps in service provision) should improve the position further. As Middlesbrough’s dedicated support team fulfils a very important role it is to be hoped that this team approach and structure can be continued in the future.

RECOMMENDATIONS

110. Following the submitted evidence, and based on the conclusions above, the scrutiny panel's recommendations for consideration by the Overview and Scrutiny board and the Executive are as follows:
- 1) That the position concerning the number of foster carers in Middlesbrough continues to be monitored and that every effort is made to increase numbers through such measures as publicity via Middlesbrough News, other appropriate media and advertising.
 - 2) That existing training provision for foster carers is maintained and built on in order to encourage an increased number of carers.
 - 3) That the results of the national pilot scheme relating to the supported lodging scheme are assessed to determine whether any examples of best practice can be developed in Middlesbrough, or whether there are any funding opportunities which can be pursued. Work should also be undertaken to increase the profile of the supported lodging scheme.
 - 4) That work is undertaken with appropriate partners (eg Connexions and further education providers) to:
 - a) improve the position in respect of securing local private/commercial sector work experience or employment placements for young people in care.
 - b) reduce the numbers of young people in care who would otherwise be not in education, employment or training ('NEET').
 - 5) That in respect of mental health support for children looked after:
 - a) work is continued to address the gaps which have been identified in service provision, in particular in relation to children and young people with a dual diagnosis (ie more than one mental health need).
 - b) in terms of Middlesbrough Council's staffing and management structure, existing support arrangements are at least maintained, given the high level of service which is currently provided.

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- Suzanne King - Deputy Director, Children, Families and Learning - Intervention and Safeguarding
- Jill Blackwood - Team Manager, Social Care
- Karen Douglas-Weir - Senior Practitioner, Social Care
- John Keelty - Connexions Manager, Children, Families and Learning
- Sean Kershaw - Development Worker, Social Care
- Jane Wilson - Fostering Team Manager, Social Care
- Jane Young - Leaving Care Team Manager, Social Care

BACKGROUND PAPERS

112. The following background papers were consulted or referred to in preparing this report:

- Minutes of Children and Learning Scrutiny Panel meetings: 3 July, 22 July, 13 August, 1 September and 24 September 2008.
- Reports submitted to the above Children and Learning Scrutiny Panel meetings.
- Summary of "Care Matters:Time for Change" White Paper - DfES Publication - June 2007.
- Report: "Middlesbrough Council Fostering Service - Statement of Purpose 2008/09."

113. Information was also obtained from the websites of The Department for Children, Schools and Families (www.standards.dfes.gov.uk); Every Child Matters (everychildmatters.gov.uk), Teachernet (www.teachernet.gov.uk); and the Local Government Information Unit (www.lgiu.gov.uk).

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